

LANDOWNER-LESSEE/SPORTSMAN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Minutes of Regular Meeting Saturday, January 17, 2004 Arizona Game and Fish Department - Phoenix Office

Committee Members Present

Sue Chilton, Arizona Game and Fish Commission
Sanford Cohen, OHV-Sportsmen Group
Darcy Ely, Livestock Grower
Jon Fugate, Sportsmen Group
Steve Gobat, Bureau of Land Management
George McKay, Coronado National Forest
Richard Rico, Special Services Assistant Director, AGFD
Phil Smith, Sportsmen Group
Stephen Williams, Arizona State Land Department

Committee Members Absent

Shelby Bennett, Livestock Grower
Ron Eichelberger, Sportsmen Group
Hubby Grounds, Livestock Grower
John P. King, Livestock Grower
Jerry Reid, Sportsmen Group
Ron Searle, Livestock Grower

Others Present

Josh Avey, Landowner Relations Program Manager, AGFD
Troy Christensen, Landowner Relations Program, AGFD
Brian Cypert, Sportsmen Group
Charles Hansen, Sportsmen Group
Gerry Perry, Regional Supervisor- Tucson, AGFD
Larry Voyles, Regional Supervisor- Yuma, AGFD
Matt Walton, Landowner Relations Program, AGFD
Mark Weise, Development Branch Chief, AGFD

Meeting Notes

The Landowner-Lessee/ Sportsman Relations Committee (Committee) meeting was called to order at 9:07 a.m.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The Committee accepted the meeting minutes for August 6, 2003.

Committee Member Business

The committee unanimously reelected Sanford Cohen and Jon Fugate to hold the positions of Committee Chairman and Vice Chairman respectively. Troy Christensen informed the Committee that Ron Searle had submitted his resignation. Mr. Christensen also relayed a message from Hubby Grounds, which stated that although he would like to continue to serve on the Committee, he would understand if the committee felt that they needed to replace him with someone whose schedule allowed for better meeting attendance. Jon Fugate suggested that we ask if Jim Chilton would be interested in filling the livestock grower position vacated by Mr. Searle. Sue Chilton, unable to comment on her husband's willingness, suggested also contacting Joe Austin. Gerry Perry suggested Wayne Lackner (who spoke about Border Patrol issues at the January 2003 LLSRC meeting). Attention turned to the other livestock grower position. Sanford Cohen proposed waiting to see if Mr. Grounds could make it to the next meeting. It was decided to at least look into finding a replacement. Stephen Williams suggested looking for someone from the northern part of the state to maintain the Committee's representation of ranchers statewide. Mr. Williams said that he would contact the Stockmen's Association regarding a possible replacement. Jon Fugate suggested that Jim O'Haco might be a good candidate. The Landowner Relations Program (LRP) was instructed to contact these nominees, determine if they wanted to serve, and, if so, then to go ahead and submit the nominations to the Commission for approval.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Chilton spoke in opposition to the Tumacacori Highlands Wilderness Proposal, which would designate 84,573 acres of Coronado National Forest as wilderness. The wilderness would border her ranch and could be beneficial to her, but Commissioner Chilton favors multiple use of the land and she knows that road closures and other restrictions will follow. Jon Fugate agreed and referred attention to a well-researched letter, which the Yuma Valley Rod and Gun Club had sent to the U.S. Congress. The letter opposed the wilderness proposal due to reduced abilities for public access, enforcement, and wildlife management. The letter addressed varied problems which have arisen at other wilderness areas such as difficulties in building or maintaining game waters, difficulties for hunters (since even wheeled game carriers are prohibited), difficulties to perform wildlife management measures, and hampering the Border patrol and Homeland Security efforts. Gerry Perry commented that most of the roads into the area are already locked to public access. The Commission is scheduled to address this wilderness proposal at the March meeting. Richard Rico suggested that a letter from the Committee might help the Commission with their decision. A motion was approved for Jon Fugate to write a draft of the letter, which, after Sanford Cohen has signed it, would be sent to the Commission, as well as, U. S. Congress, the governor, and state officials. Other Committee members offered input for the letter.

Updates/Current Issues

Josh Avey introduced Mark Weise, the new Development Branch Chief; Mr. Weise replaced Fred Bloom who filled the vacant Engineering Supervisor position. Mr. Avey then updated the Committee on several items. The Committee was briefed about the two state Habitat Stewardship award winners: Tom Caniglia and Jim Fletcher. Mr. Avey informed the Committee that the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies selected our nomination of the Babbitt Ranch to win the Private Land Stewardship Award. Mr. Avey told the Committee that the Landowner Relations Program (LRP) would be featured on the Wildlife Views television show. Mr. Avey informed the Committee about proposed legislation (S 1840) that would provide federal funding for the acquisition of perpetual easements to assure access to state and federal lands.

Mr. Avey gave the Committee an update on the Landowner Incentive Program (LIP). The LRP currently has 12 applicants (about \$900,000.00 worth) for LIP funding and all are expected to be awarded soon. These are mutually beneficial stewardship projects, which will benefit “at risk” species and potential habitats on private property such as trying to improve leopard frog habitat by building stock tanks. In February, we should know if the LRP was awarded the next appropriated level, which is potentially \$1.3 million. The LRP is currently involved in outreach efforts to increase public awareness of this funding source and its great potential. Commissioner Chilton suggested that the LRP contact Doc Lane about giving a presentation on LIP and the Department’s newly created Farm Bill Coordinator at one of the Arizona Cattle Growers Association’s upcoming meetings. Stephen Williams added that the Arizona State Land Department also received federal funding for a position to deal with the Environmental Quality Incentive Program portion of the 2002 Farm Bill program. Commissioner Chilton also suggested that the LRP give the Commission a presentation on all the new programs especially showing on the ground accomplishments and all the cooperators.

Mr. Avey gave an update on some of the action items from the last meeting. Signs written in Spanish to address the undocumented aliens use of ranch waters were created and have been distributed to many ranches in southern Arizona. The LRP is looking into working with the Natural Resource Conservation Service to use Natural Resource Conservation District offices and staff to help us distribute information. Refrigerator magnets had been created with some important Department contact information for distribution to ranchers.

Mr. Avey presented the Committee with information on proactive OHV management areas. Desert Wells Multi-Use Area is complete and the many cooperators are making it a success. The memorandum of understanding (MOU) for the Granite Mountain area will go before the Commission for approval in about three months. The route inventory for the Middle Gila Conservation Partnership Area is being worked on; this area is about 15 to 20 times larger than Desert Wells and has even more cooperating agencies.

A short discussion ensued regarding several other proposed MOU’s, workgroups, and efforts, which would affect public access. One such item was proposed federal legislation, which would provide \$50 million annually to states through the US Department of Agriculture. The voluntary private lands recreational access bill would create greater public access to private lands, while providing economic incentives to landowners to enhance wildlife habitat. Richard Rico suggested that the Committee write a letter to Congress addressing the need for this legislation.

Identification of Current Issues and Possible Solutions

Gerry Perry informed the Committee about some positive efforts made by sportsmen groups in southern Arizona. Archery groups have reimbursed a rancher for livestock, which was shot by hunters. This effort was well received by the rancher, and it has led to the Southern Arizona Sportsmen’s Alliance trying to set up a mechanism so people can donate to a fund, which would be used for these types of situations.

The Committee discussed the ongoing efforts to create uniform laws to allow for better law enforcement and signage. Sanford Cohen updated the Committee on the Bureau of Land Management efforts to revise grazing regulations and the efforts of the “Fox Group” to reform State Trust Lands.

Phil Smith spoke about the successes of Desert Wells Multi-Use Area and how the ranchers were surprised at how well it was working. Good planning, signage, brochures, and gates were all necessary for the success, but the efforts of all the volunteer groups have been what has made the difference. The volunteers have made up for the lack of sufficient law enforcement by patrolling the area, reporting violations, and informing recreationists of laws. Mr. Smith asked if there was any way for the Department or the Committee to give volunteers additional support. The LRP already provides coordination, tools, materials, signs (to recognize the groups' efforts), and publicity for the volunteers involved in the Adopt-a-Ranch Program. But since the volunteers are so effective and important, the Committee decided to brainstorm to determine if additional assistance can be provided to them, such as recognition programs, training on laws to give them a sense of empowerment, prize raffles for volunteers, etc. The meeting had to end, but it was agreed to make this important issue an agenda item at the next meeting.

Next Meeting

The Committee decided that the next meeting should be scheduled in conjunction with the Arizona Cattle Growers Association Convention, which will be held at the Prescott Resort during the last week of July. The LRP will contact Doc Lane to schedule the LLSRC meeting at such a time as to avoid conflicts with State Lands, Federal Lands, and Game meetings. Committee members will be informed of the date and time of the meeting once it has been determined.

Action Items:

1. Contact Doc Lane about a presentation on LIP and the Department's newly created Farm Bill Coordinator at an upcoming Arizona Cattle Growers Association meeting. (LRP Staff)
2. Meeting minutes distributed to all members. (LRP Staff)
3. Give the Commission a presentation on the new programs, which shows on the ground accomplishments and cooperators. (LRP Staff)
4. Contact the Stockmen's Association regarding a possible replacement for Hubby Grounds. (Stephen Williams)
5. Contact nominees (including Jim Chilton, Joe Austin, Wayne Lackner, and/or Jim O'Haco), determine if they want to serve on the LLSRC, and then submit the nominations to the Commission for approval. (LRP Staff)
6. Contact Doc Lane to schedule the next LLSRC meeting at such a time as to avoid conflicts with ASLD, Federal Land, and game meetings. Inform Committee. (LRP Staff)
7. Write a letter to Congress addressing the need for the proposed private lands recreational access bill legislation. (Sanford Cohen)
8. Draft a letter in opposition to the Tumacacori Highlands Wilderness Proposal for the March 12, 2004 Commission meeting; the letter will also be sent to the U. S. Congress, the governor, and state officials. (Jon Fugate)

